

Christmas Cottage



(via email)

Planning
Council Offices
West Berkshire Council
Market Street
Newbury
RG14 5LD

Subject: WBC LPR Regulation 19 Objection

My name is Russell Holland. I am a resident of Bucklebury Village and live within the Bucklebury Conservations area.

I object to the Local Plan review proposal to build between 1500 and 2500 houses to the North East of Thatcham. While acknowledging that more housing will be required in West Berkshire during the review period and beyond, I believe that there are elements of The Plan that are unsound and that will damage quality-of-life for both the current and future population of the area.

I also believe that The Plan has a strong potential to do lasting damage to the rich natural environment that we enjoy today and which should be nurtured for future generations.

The following objections reflect my perceptions of how the Plan will impact me as an individual and the wider community:

Transport

This large development of homes, many of which will have multiple car ownership, will significantly increase the number of cars in the area and the numbers of car journeys made each day.

While it may be anticipated that the vast majority of additional journeys will be accommodated, though not without the potential for congestion, by the main A4 road, The Plan will inevitably increase the volume of traffic on the network of (country) roads to the North and East of the proposed development area. These roads:

East West:

- Cold Ash to Chapel Row
- Hermitage to Chapel Row
- Bucklebury Village to Frilsham
- Chapel Row to Bradfield Southend
- Hermitage to Yattendon

North South, including but not limited to:

- Fanny's Lane
- Briff Lane
- Pease Hill
- and others

These roads and wider the network of lanes in the Pang valley are already under stress. Increased traffic volumes, increased vehicle size and every appearance of inadequate maintenance have created hazardous and unsightly highways.

The hazards include:

- Verge erosion that has extend the carriageway beyond the limit of the metalled surface which in turn has created deep ruts at each side into which cars can or may be forced to drive.
- Significant pot holes and ruts in the road surface. This creates a particular hazard for cyclists that chose to ride in the Pang Valley and in the AONB.

The proposed development will increase traffic volumes, exacerbate the deterioration of the road system, increase that level of hazard and detract from the aesthetic qualities of the AONB in which they are located

A previous Local Transport Plan (WBC 940, by Adams Hendry) indicates that the "Highways and Transport Environment Directorate" of WBC is responsible for delivering a sustainable transport system. Whether this goal is being met in the Pang Valley is questionable but the sheer scale of the proposed development is almost certain to exacerbate problems with attainment.

Additional objections related to transport:

- Any increase in east bound traffic will lead to congestion and to an increase in the already, hazardous conditions where Common Hill meets the A340 at the south east corner of the Englefield Estate
- The potential for increased congestion and pollution at the Thatcham railway crossing. Inevitably, this may increase traffic flows over the railway bridge at Brimpton and addition strain on routes to the A339 road to Basingstoke.
- The apparent nature and extent of the proposed development will make short car journeys a necessity to access shops, schools, medical practices and leisure activities. Again, more pollution and congestion.

Healthcare

I am registered at the Chapel Row Surgery and have previously been registered at both the Downland and Thatcham practices. The resources of my current practice appear to be stretched and enquiries to a peer group suggests that this is also true of the Thatcham practice.

I am not clear how the measures in the proposed plan will deal with the Healthcare needs of the increased population. The offer of a healthcare building and a GP practice falls considerably short of what I would consider to be a joined up solution for a community of this size.

Even on the basic offer in the Plan, the difficulty in creating a new GP practice appears to have been underestimated. This fuels my concern that existing practices will be stressed further.

The same concerns exist in the context of dental care. I use private dental care because there appears to be a shortage in local provision by the NHS. I'm told that new arrivals in the area have to travel further afield to receive dental care. There is little in the proposed plan or in material that I've been able to access to suggest that adequate provision will be made.

Education

At present, children in Bucklebury have options both at primary and secondary level. The proposed Plan does not make it clear how school capacity will be provided for an increased population and my fear is that existing schools will become unreasonably crowded and that choice will be removed for both parents and children. I object to either of these eventualities.

The Environment

I live in the AONB and within the boundary of the Bucklebury Conservation Area. I believe that both should serve and continue to serve as:

- A near pristine amenity for the enjoyment and well-being of people in the area
- A means of protecting and maintaining diversity in flora and fauna
- A way of preserving and sustaining landscape and important rural activities.

I have no wish and there can be no mechanism to restrict access to these areas but a development of this scale, with what would seem to be inadequate provision for leisure and social activity, on the edge of the protected area will inevitably leads to degradation and loss.

The importance of Bucklebury Common should not be underestimated. The work that is being done to preserve its structure and biodiversity is hugely important and the siting of a development on the scale of that which is proposed is certain to impair and devalue it.

A recent assessment of the Bucklebury Conservation area notes potential harm to the public and natural realms. These include:

- Degradation of grass verges
- Degradation of the surface and the edges of the metalled road
- Damage to and shrinkage of the grassed/planted traffic island in the centre Bucklebury village.
- On street car parking.
- Loss of flora and fauna due the attrition of specific species and attrition in the spaces in which flora and fauna can thrive.
- Loss through unsustainable levels of footfall.

Bucklebury Village attracts and welcomes visitors that come:

- To appreciate the environment that is the Conservation Area and surrounding countryside.
- To access the junior football coaching that takes place on the playing field.
- To use the Victory Room which hosts clubs, classes and a other appropriate activities

These amenities are used in a manner and with a frequency that sustains their fabric and respects the needs of village residents.

I believe that the proposed development, as specified, is light on support for social and physical activities and if that is the case then the likely pressure on Bucklebury Village, on the Conservation area and on the surrounding countryside will be excessive and damaging.

General Comment

Previous Structure Plans have spread necessary development across multiple locations. The approach appears to have worked tolerably well.

However, the development of what is effectively a new settlement without a centre, where the amenity is missing or inadequately defined (viz: infrastructure, , health, education, social and shopping) is a concerning prospect. One that will have a negative impact both the current population and those who will be the new comers and one to which I object.

I am happy to discuss these comments in the context of this review should that be a requirement.

Russell Holland